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HOLINESS AND THE GREEK TONGUE

BY

Professor Newton Wray

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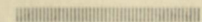
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HOLINESS AND THE GREEK TONGUE

Professor Newton Wray

The advent of Jesus Christ occurred at a date described as "the fulness of time," signifying not only an hour for the fulfillment of prophecy but also that providential preparation which predisposed to the reception of Christianity and facilitated its spread among men.

The factors in this preparation may be included under four general heads:

1. The moral state of the world.
2. The Roman Empire.
3. The Greek language.
4. The location of Jewish Synagogues everywhere.

As to the first, it needs only to be said, that the world groped in the darkness of error and wallowed in the slime of sensualism. Civilization was effete; morals were sunk into an abyss; philosophy and culture had reached the summit of attainment only to evince their incapability of solving the prob-

lem of life and death or of inspiring humanity with a pure and lofty hope. It seems that God allowed material civilization and the mental output of man to have their utmost chance in order to prove their impotence to save the world. Thus it came that disappointed with these things, men were ready for the Gospel.

The vast extent of the Roman Empire, with its single authority and uniform law, its age of peace enabling Christian workers to go everywhere unmolested by the complications of war; and its wonderful system of roads, which covered the empire like a network and greatly increased the facility of travel and correspondence;—was of incalculable advantage to the cause of Christianity.

But the factor calling for special mention, in the preparation for the embodiment and propagation of the Gospel of Christ, was the Greek language. By the conquests of Alexander and the planting of Greek Colonies, with synagogues where both Jews and Gentile proselytes worshiped, this magnifi-

cent tongue had become well-nigh universal. In every province and in every city missionaries preached the gospel in Greek. A Greek version of the Old Testament had been in use nearly three hundred years. Our Savior Himself made use of this version as well as the Hebrew original. It was the language of the New Testament, wherein by tongue and pen the glad tidings were proclaimed to all people.

Divine wisdom provided a vehicle for the truth, in a language incomparably adapted to receive and convey the spiritual revelation of Christianity. It was the most flexible and expressive language in the world. The able historian, John Clark Ridpath, in one of the most eloquent tributes ever paid to this tongue, has not exaggerated its superiority. After speaking of the fulness and expressiveness of its nouns and adjectives, he says:

“But it was the Greek verb which most of all exhibited the fecundity of the language. Here was revealed the great force and perspicuity of the speech of the Hellenes. A

double series of affixes, added or prefixed to the verb-roots, clearly distinguished the tenses as to the time and completeness of the action expressed by them. For past time the augment, and for completed action the reduplication, furnished delicate discriminations for which we should look in vain in Latin or in any other tongue ever spoken in Europe. The root of the Greek verb was thus subject to a kind of development by means of endings and prefixes until the exact notion of the time, its point and duration and the completeness of the action, was expressed with a specific delicacy of which no other language has ever shown itself susceptible.

“There was thus established among all the parts of the formal structure of the Greek tongue a kind of sympathetic union which moved the whole as one. A Greek sentence was agitated through all its length and depth by the stress of the expression. The paragraph trembled from end to end when the thrill of life awoke in any part. The language, with its multitudinous endings, all

in harmonious accord, lay like a rich meadow of stately timothy swaying and waving in the breezes of thought. Each stalk nodded to its fellow. The ripple of mirth danced over the surface like a scarcely perceptible breath of air. The shadow chased the sunshine, and the sunshine the shadow. A sigh came out of the forest and a deeper wave moved gently away to the distance. The thrill of joy, the message of defiance, the moan of the disconsolate spirit, the peal of battle, the shout of victory, every mood and every emotion which the mind of man in his most vigorous estate is capable of experiencing, swept in rolling billows across the pulsating bosom of this beautiful speech.

“The tongue of the Greeks was, in its kind, as preeminent as their literature. The one was the counterpart of the other. So wonderful in its completeness is the grammatical structure of the language that it has been made, not without good reason, the foundation of linguistic study in nearly all the universities of the world. The historian, Curtius,

in summing up the structural elegance of Greek, thus assigns to its true place the speech of the Hellenic race: 'If the grammar of their language were the only thing remaining to us of the Hellenes, it would serve as a full and valid testimony to the extraordinary natural gifts of this people which, after with creative power appropriating the material of their language, penetrated every part of it with the spirit, and nowhere left a dead, inert mass behind it—of a people which, in spite of its decisive abhorrence of everything bombastic, circumstantial, or obscure, understood how to accomplish an infinity of results by the simplest means. The whole language resembles the body of an artistically trained athlete, in which every muscle, every sinew, is developed into full play, where there is no trace of tumidity or of inert matter, and all is power and life.' "

In the marvelous language, then everywhere spoken and awaiting the revelation that should bless mankind, the Holy Spirit enshrined for all time the Gospel of the grace

of God. That its adaptation to the end in view may be appreciated, let us notice those features which bear directly upon the doctrine we hold in trust for others. The better to do this, and make the subject stand out in clear outline, the following lines of discussion will be followed:

I. Passages illustrating the force of the Greek tenses, to prepare the way for examination of the subject proper.

II. Passages misapplied to the experience of entire sanctification.

III. Passages describing the human agency in this experience.

IV. Passages implying both the human and the divine agencies.

V. Passages in which the divine agency alone is set forth.

I. First, then, consider three typical passages.

1. "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man desire (or is willing) to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up

his cross and follow me."

The verbs "to come after," "deny himself," and "take up his cross," are *aorist*, while the verb for "desire" or "willing" and that for "follow," are *present*.

The present tense in Greek denotes continued or repeated action. The aorist tense is peculiar to the Greek tongue and denotes (from *aoristis*, unlimited, unqualified) a past occurrence with none of the limitations as to completion, continuance, repetitions, etc., which belong to the other past tenses. It has been called the instantaneous tense, signifying decisive, completed action, performed at a definite time. It is true that this tense is some times, in animated language, called the *gnomic* aorist, and then may be translated by the English present. But in such instances one distinct case in past time is vividly used to represent all possible cases. For example, *disheartened men never yet raised a trophy* (i. e., *never raise a trophy*). Again, *and he fell when an oak once fell*; which may be rendered, *as when some oak*

falls. Now this freedom of translation does not affect the character of the tense. It refers to something that occurred at a definite point of time.

Observe how these definitions fit the passage quoted. The present tense of *desire* or *willing* implies not only at any time, but all the time. Some people never get beyond desiring (or *willing*.) But in order to get salvation, this continuity of desire, or *willing*, must be broken off by decisive action. Hence the aorist tense indicates that *conversion*, or the "denying self" and "taking up the cross," is instantaneous, while the present tense of *follow* shows habitual action.

In Matt. 8:15, we have a case of healing and service. "And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose and ministered unto them." Here the aorist occurs, except for "ministered," which is the imperfect tense and points to a continued action in the past. Thus, the passage is explained—The Master touched her hand (a single, instantaneous act), the fever left her

(instantly), and she arose (at once), and ministered unto them (continuously, while they remained).

Another suggestive passage is that concerning Peter's repentance after denying the Lord. Matthew and Luke both say he "remembered the word of Jesus" (*aorist*—an instantaneous recurrence to mind), and "went out (forthwith) and wept bitterly," (*aorist* with abverb "bitterly," to show excessive grief). Mark, however, says, "and when he thought thereon (*aorist*), he wept" (*imperfect*, denoting that he *kept on weeping*). The verbs are very graphic. The clause, "When he thought thereon," is *aorist* participle, from the preposition *epi*, upon and *ballo*, to throw, cast. The Greek verb to weep indicates intense emotion, and may be rendered "wail aloud," "sob." The statement runs literally, *having thrown himself upon this saying of Jesus, the moment it came to mind, he sobbed and sobbed and sobbed*. A vivid touch, this to prove Peter's oversight in the composition of Mark's Gospel. Who

but impulsive Peter, so radical in his denial, could describe so well the sudden, violent, and revolutionary mental state that followed the look of Jesus, and found expression in this Gospel?

II. Taking up next, misapplied passages, we strike a point not carefully guarded by some advocates of this doctrine. Nothing is made by seizing upon the word sanctification, or holiness, wherever found, and yoking it to the distinctive idea of a second work of grace, regardless of the book or context in which it occurs, or of the intent of the writer.

The first group of such misapplied passages consists of those which refer to the judicial transaction of God in the Cross for believers. An example is Rom. 6:6, which may be rendered literally, "Knowing this that our old man was crucified (*aorist*) with Him, in order that the body of sin might be done away, (*aorist*) that we *should no longer be subject* (*present tense—now or anytime*)

to sin." The great argument of Paul turns upon the identification of the believer (in God's purpose) with Christ on the cross. The old nature was as certainly dealt with there, as were the sins that proceed from it, and dealt with judicially, that we might experimentally realize deliverance from it, the clause—"that the body of sin might be destroyed," being the object of that judicial visitation. The aorist "was crucified," and the tenses of the next verse prove this. The verse reads, "For he that died (aorist), hath been justified (perfect) from sin." Because of this identification with our Divine substitute, God has accounted righteous all whom He foreknows as believing on Christ, and does actually so account them upon their faith; the perfect tense, "hath been justified," bringing the transaction on down from the Cross to the actual experience of the believer. Thus we died in Christ, that we might be delivered from the penalty of sin, or be justified, and enabled, as verse 11 below states, to "reckon (ever afterwards—*present tense*) ourselves

to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the experimental phase of the holiness judicially provided by God in Christ.

Another group of misapplied passages is composed of those referring to regeneration and separation to a new life. They have their key in the words of Jesus to His disciples before Pentecost: "Now ye are clean through the words which I have spoken unto you." Paul reminds the Church at Corinth, which he had reproached for its carnality, that those who were guilty of certain sins should not inherit the kingdom of God, and adds: "And such were some of you; but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

The imperfect is used in the first clause and implies that such was their habitual state and constant practice. The verb "were washed" is aorist middle, which represents the subject as acting on himself, and points to the human element in the process of

cleansing. The verb occurs in the same voice in Acts 22:16—"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on His name." They renounced their sins and submitted to divine cleansing. The verbs "were sanctified," "were justified," are in the *aorist passive* which shows that the subjects were acted upon, and that the divine element is emphasized. They had experienced a change of character, complete as to the points referred to. They were justified, they were washed from sinful pollutions, and sanctified, or set apart and devoted to sacred employment. That this meaning of sanctify is relevant to the divine agency in man's devotion to a holy life is clear from Eph. 2:10—"For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before appointed that we should walk in them." These Corinthian believers were certainly justified and regenerated, but they were not wholly sanctified, as the epistle plainly shows. They were sanctified in the sense of regeneration and separation to a

new life.

I Thess. 4:3 is another example of taking a passage out of its connections to prove something not specifically treated. The context makes it evident that the sanctification noted is abstinence from unlawful indulgence, and must be true of every Christian who abides in the Lord. Only so can he be in line for the fuller blessing prayed for in the next chapter,—“The God of peace sanctify you wholly.” The Revised Version which gives the original more exactly, reads:

“Finally then, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as ye received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, even as ye do walk—that ye abound more and more. For ye know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God even your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles which know not God; that

no man transgress, and wrong his brother in the matter: because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified. For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who giveth His Holy Spirit unto you."

Once more: There are passages which have to do with *maturity* rather than purity, or to the perfected state of the saints at the resurrection. An example is Phil. 3:12, which opponents of Christian perfection make use of. Here, again, the context reveals the apostle's meaning. The verb is in the perfect tense and signifies "perfected" and must be distinguished from the word "perfect" in verse 15, which reads: "Let us therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded." As Bengel puts it: "The perfect and the perfected are different; the former is equipped for the race, the latter is close on the prize."

III. Pass now to the scriptures describing the human agency in this exper-

ience. As in conversion, so in obtaining the blessing of Pentecost, there is the definite, complete act of meeting conditions, and the equally definite, complete act of the Holy Spirit in working the changes answering to the former. The two great spiritual crises are alike in their essential facts of submission and salvation. When our Lord said, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off," He employed the aorist tense in the command, showing that there must be no dallying, no lingering process of getting rid of what imperils the soul.

Instant obedience is the first requisite to salvation. God does not trifle with sin. It is dealt with the moment a man renounces it. Every passage gives the same clear, unequivocal testimony.

2 Tim. 2:21—"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work." *Purge* is aorist and indicates immediate, completed action, while the perfect tense of "sanctified,"

and "prepared," suggest that he has experienced the reality for which he purged himself.

James 4:8—"Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands ye sinners, purify your hearts, ye double-minded." The second sentence explains how to draw nigh to God. The verbs "draw nigh," "cleanse," and "purify," are *aorist* and prove that the classes referred to may reach the goal by swift obedience. They are to do the things commanded not only thoroughly, but also at once, wasting no time about it.

James 1:21—"Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls." The exhortation is to Christians. The word translated "superfluity" in A. V. and "overflowing" in R. V. signifies *residue, remains, what is left over*, and with its associate word may be rendered as in Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: "The wickedness remaining over in the Christian from his state prior to conversion."

Now, the verbs are *aorist* and prove that this putting away the residue of sin, which is done by disallowing it and submitting to be cleansed from it, and this receiving the word, and the deliverance wrought by it, take place immediately, as a completed act.

Gal. 5:24—"And they that are of Christ crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." Here again we have the completed act of the *aorist*. The difficulty presented by this text is that it seems to apply to all Christians and to refer to their justification (for surely they are the Lord's). Opponents of the second work of grace have taken it with verse 17 as proof of their position. This verse reads: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would." The term flesh is sometimes employed to designate the body; as, for example, passages that speak of Jesus Christ having come "in the flesh." In other passages, it refers to the unregenerate state;

e. g., "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." That is the state in which the Adamic nature dominates, in which there is not the same conflict as in the regenerate soul. In a sense, the Holy Spirit does lust against the flesh of the sinner, striving against his fleshly inclinations, to enable him to repent and turn to God. But the context here implies a state of conflict in believers. Then the term flesh must signify that bias or principle in their moral nature, whose dreadful works are catalogued in the verses following the statement describing this conflict. The Holy Spirit thus helps the regenerate believer to overcome his sinful inclinations, that he "may not do the things he would."

Now, if verse 24 includes those whose experience is recorded in verse 17, we are compelled to admit a sense in which even the sinner who comes to Christ, crucified his flesh, with its passions and desires, in order to be saved. This he must do, so far as his will is concerned, and in the measure of the

light received, by renouncing everything that nourishes the flesh and devoting himself to the will of God. Of course, since only the Holy Spirit can baptize him into the death of the cross and make actual in experience the judicial transaction of God in Christ, there awaits him a fuller revelation of grace and the fiery purgation that shall make him "dead indeed unto sin."

But the apostle may simply intend a certain class of Christians, by his statement in verse 24. In which case he states a contrast with unsaved sinners and means that the crucifixion of the flesh took place only after the persons so designated became Christians, without attempting to say that all Christians have realized this phase of salvation. This would harmonize it with verse 20 of the second chapter, in which he declares that he *has been crucified with Christ*, the perfect Greek tense indicating that something has occurred which is now a matter of experience.

As illustrating the instantaneity of this

blessing, by passages that mention only the human agency involved, one other class of scriptures may be cited—those that speak of its *reception by faith*. An example is Gal. 3:14—“that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” The Spirit is received just as Christ is received, by an instantaneous act of faith.

IV. Passages in which both the human and the divine agencies are implied.

Take first our Lord's command, “Tarry ye in the city until ye be clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:29. Both verbs are in the *aorist tense*. We might have expected to find “tarry” in the present, since this tense signifies continued action. But no; the accuracy of the Greek tongue is seen in that the *aorist* here shows the completeness of their consecration at the very beginning of their waiting for the promised Spirit and the maintenance of that attitude every moment of expectation, until the fire fell. One cannot begin to tarry until his consecration is

complete. How they were clothed with power, was suggested by the aorist tense in passages that pointed to the event. Jesus had told certain men to come after Him and He would make them "to become fishers of men." "To become" is *aorist*, implying that this was to be no long process of gradualism, but, as the fulfillment of the promise revealed, by the sudden influx of Divine wisdom and power in the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire.

A striking proof of this truth is found in Paul's exhortation to the carnal Christians at Corinth. After saying, "Our mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged," he declares, "Ye are not straightened in us, but ye are straightened in your own affections; now for a recompense in like kind (I speak as unto my children), be ye also enlarged." The exhortation is in the *aorist* tense and proves that he wishes them to pass at once out of their carnal strait into "a broad place where there is no straightness, and that which is set on their table should be full of fatness." See Job 36:16. It was a

call to immediate possession of their spiritual heritage of holiness and power in the gospel of Christ. So he goes on to urge them to separate themselves from unbelievers and every unclean thing, assuring them that only so can they know the fellowship of the Father, and closes his exhortation with the words: "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

"Cleanse" is *aorist*, because this consecration is to be effected without delay, and "perfecting" is in the *present* tense, as pointing out the growth in holiness that follows this spiritual enlargement.

Is there not a hint of such a second work of grace in the apostle's language in the first chapter of this second epistle to the Corinthians, stating, "And in this confidence I was minded to come before you, that ye might have a second benefit," the word "benefit" being *charis*—grace? So, also he writes to the Romans, "For I long to see you, that

I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established." "Established" is *aorist* and refers to something decisive and transformatory, that causes those experiencing it to be established. The baptism of the Holy Spirit which followed apostolic preaching and laying on of hands, is the grace of establishment.

Cognate with this thought is the word "perfect," "perfection." The Greek for the adjective is *teleios*, for the noun *teleiotes*, and for the verb, *teleioo*. All go back to the noun *telos*, which signifies *end*; in Greek writers, always of the end of some act or state; in the Scriptures, however, it is used also of a temporal end. The term is spoken of that by which a thing is finished, and of the end to which things relate, involving purpose. In this sense we have *teleology*, meaning the doctrine of rational ends in the cosmos and involving the adaptation of means to ends.

This will simplify the question before us, and show how little ground there is for ani-

madversion against the doctrine we cherish. Christian perfection is not absolute perfection, which belongs to God alone. It is relative, and has respect to the end of the Christian vocation. We are familiar with this thought in other things. We say, "That is a perfect tree," meaning perfect in relation to the idea of comparison, which is the end of the tree. If that idea is form, perfection is the sum of qualities which make form. If the idea is fruit-bearing, the tree may be imperfect in form and yet perfect as a fruit tree. When we speak of a perfect Christian, we do not imply that he is free from imperfections of every sort, but that divine grace has come to an end in him, as to sin and service, freeing him from all that is offensive to God and crippling to his own life, and empowering him to glorify the Lord in the full measure of his capacity. In a word, it is to adapt him perfectly to his calling and to put him where, in the language of the saintly Paul, "Christ shall be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death."

An incident will emphasize the point. A man explained to a friend that his strength was daily worn out by his having two falcons to tame, two hares to keep from running away, two hawks to manage, a serpent to confine, a lion to chain, and a sick man to tend and wait on; the falcons were his eyes, the hares his feet, the hawks his hands, the serpent, his tongue, the lion his heart with which he had to maintain a continual fight, and the sick man, his whole body always needing his watchfulness and care. Now, the purpose of the gospel is to emancipate a man from this bondage to self, that he may be at his best for God. What with this absorption with self, this occupation with internecine foes, little energy is left for warfare against sin in the world, and little proof given of the power of an Almighty Savior. Far better is that spiritual emancipation which demonstrates to sin-bound souls the efficacy of grace, according to the holy covenant, "to grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve

Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."

Such is the import of the "perfect love" that casteth out fear, and which we are exhorted to have. "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,"—perfect in love as He is perfect in love; loving, as the context explains, fully, freely, impartially, disinterestedly; loving even our enemies and praying for them who persecute us. This implies that everything opposite to love has been cast out. Paul so meant when he showed the Corinthians the surpassingly excellent way of love, and exhorted them to be "men." The Greek for *men* is *teleios*—perfect. This was not maturity in the sense of the result of long growth. He wished them to possess the wisdom and love with which the Holy Spirit fills the soul when He purges out the evil tempers. He refers to the experience which comes by faith and is epochal in character and results, but which should be the normal state of believers.

Such is the implication of Heb. 6:1—

“Wherefore leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us go unto perfection.” (Teleiotes). Conybeare translates freely, “unto fullness of its teaching.” This agrees well with the statement about the first principles to which some were confining themselves. What else does it come to, but the experience which such teaching represents as a duty and a privilege? The Scriptures witness how the apostles ever sought to lead believers into its enjoyment.

The Greek of the passage confirms this view. “Unto” is the preposition *epi*, which signifies not merely motion to a thing, but arrival and rest upon the point of destination. This perfection is attainable. The original for “let us go on,” is *pherometha*, both middle and passive voice of *phero*, to bear. If the former, the human element is included; if the latter, the divine agency is stressed, and the passage runs,—“let us be borne unto perfection.” O the grace of this! Quit arguing; cease from struggling; commit yourself

in faith to the stream of God's will, and you will be borne out into the ocean of perfect love.

V. Lastly, there are the passages in which the divine agency alone is set forth. Two or three will suffice for examination, to bring out the two aspects of this blessing—cleansing from sin and filling with the Spirit.

1. *Cleansing*: "And God who knoweth hearts, *bare* (aor.) them witness, *giving* (2nd aor.) them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and *put no difference* (aor.) *purifying* (aor. Part.) their hearts by faith. Acts 15:8-9. The verbs are aorist, pointing to a completed action in a moment of time, which we know from the narrative of Pentecost to be a fact. God bore them witness the same instant He cleansed their hearts by faith. The verbs are the same in the cleansing of the leper, Matthew 8:2, 3. Instantaneously with the touch and word of Jesus, the leper was made perfectly whole. Not an infinitesimal particle of the virus of leprosy remained

in his body. Luke's account is very graphic. He says, "immediately the leprosy departed from him;" the verb *departed* being compounded of the preposition "from," "away from," and the verb to "go;" and the preposition "from" being repeated before "him." Now, leprosy is a type of the virus of sin which breaks out in the life. But the blood of Jesus and the fire of the Holy Spirit avail for its destruction.

2. *Filling*: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:4. The other aspect of the same blessing which Peter rehearsed before the Council at Jerusalem, in relating how Pentecost was renewed in the house of Cornelius. This double work of purifying hearts and filling them with the Holy Spirit constitutes the promised endowment of power. The filling, be it observed, must be maintained by obeying God and praying without ceasing. Again and again do we read that these same disciples, as they waited on God, were filled with the Spirit. That is, they kept filled, as the present tense

of the command, "Be ye filled with the Spirit"—Eph. 5:18 signifies, *keep filled*. In Acts 14:52, it is said, "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." The verb "were filled" is in the imperfect tense and should be rendered, "were being filled." In the language of another: "It was as though a stream of the Holy Spirit's influence were perpetually pouring into their hearts, and keeping them full to the brim." O that the whole Church would realize this secret of fruitful service and ceaseless praise!

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